

8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para) Silent Struggles: DASS-21 Insights at Camp Terendak, Melaka

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Abstract

This study comprehensively assesses stress, anxiety, and depression among paratroopers from the 8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para), based at Kem Terendak, Melaka. A sample size of 371 paratroopers participated in the study. The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21) was employed to gauge the levels of stress, anxiety, and depression experienced by the paratroopers within this unique military context. The study results reveal that paratroopers in the 8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para) stationed at Terendak Camp exhibit an average level of stress, moderate anxiety, and mild depression. These findings offer valuable insights into the psychological well-being of these military personnel operating in a challenging and demanding environment. The implications of this study are significant. By highlighting the specific levels of stress, anxiety, and depression experienced by the paratroopers, the study contributes to a better understanding of the emotional dynamics within the 8th Battalion. In response to these findings, the study summarizes recommendations to effectively manage and mitigate stress, anxiety, and depression among paratroopers. Ultimately, the study's focus on enhancing mental health and physical well-being aligns with the broader goal of optimizing paratroopers' performance and overall quality of life. By offering insights and actionable recommendations, this study serves as a valuable resource for the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para) and military organizations, fostering an environment that prioritizes the holistic well-being of its personnel.

Keywords: Stress, Anxiety, Depression, Paratroopers, Mental Health, Psychological Assessment.

Introduction

The issue of mental health inside the military is a matter of global significance, and this holds for Malaysia's armed services as well. Military personnel may encounter various mental health difficulties, encompassing strenuous training regimens and the obligations associated with active duty (Lorey & Fegert, 2022). In the context of Malaysia, it is imperative to comprehend and tackle these concerns as they have significant importance for the holistic welfare and operational efficiency of the country's military forces.

Although Malaysia is not now engaged in any active wars, participation in peacekeeping missions and border control activities may lead to individuals encountering tension and worry. The presence of intense training regimens and the physical exertion required may potentially lead to the development of stress disorders. Furthermore, the stigma surrounding mental health within certain populations in Malaysia can impede the timely identification and intervention of mental health issues. Other factors that contribute to mental health issues among military personnel include deployment pressure (Born & Zamorski, 2019; Doody et al., 2022), family separation (Pexton, Farrants & Yule, 2018; Cramm et al., 2019) and lack of mental health awareness (Coleman et al., 2017). The prevalence of mental health issues among military personnel has gained increasing attention, prompting researchers to develop effective assessment tools to evaluate psychological well-being. One such tool is the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21), designed to quantify and differentiate symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. This case study focuses on the 8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para) stationed at Camp Terendak, Melaka.

Military units' unique challenges, especially those operating in high-stress environments, underscore the significance of comprehensive psychological assessments. The DASS-21, comprising 21 items distributed across three subscales, offers a structured framework to identify and understand emotional and psychological distress experienced by military personnel. This case study aims to provide a deep psychological evaluation of the 8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para) by employing the DASS-21 scale. By administering the scale to battalion members, researchers intend to gain insights into the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms within this military unit.

Through meticulous data analysis and interpretation of DASS-21 scores, the study endeavours to unravel the mental well-being of the 8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para) at Camp Terendak. The results will enable researchers to pinpoint areas of concern, understand the interplay of psychological factors, and develop targeted interventions to support soldiers' mental health. By delving into the psychological landscape of the 8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para) through the lens of the DASS-21, this case study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the emotional challenges military personnel face. The findings can potentially inform policies, strategies, and programs to foster psychological resilience and well-being among the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para) at Camp Terendak, Melaka.

Literature Review

Stress, anxiety, and depression

The correlation between stress, anxiety, and depression has been extensively studied in the mental health field, and it has been established that these elements mutually affect the initiation and advancement of one another (Kendler et al., 2003). Cacha et al. (2019) suggest that stress can be characterized as a physical or psychological stimulus that disrupts the equilibrium of the body or mind. The impact of chronic or excessive stress on mental well-

being can be significant, potentially leading to further mental health issues such as anxiety and depression (Giorgi et al., 2020).

Anxiety is a psychological disorder characterized by excessive unease and fear. Various manifestations of this syndrome can be observed, encompassing generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and social anxiety disorder (Showraki, Showraki & Brown, 2020). Based on a study conducted by McLaughlin and Nolen-Hoeksema (2011), it has been observed through empirical data that anxiety disorders are frequently triggered by a range of stressors in individuals' lives. Depression, conversely, is commonly recognized as an effective disease that disrupts an individual's daily functioning. Individuals diagnosed with depression commonly exhibit symptoms including diminished engagement in daily activities, prolonged restlessness, alterations in appetite such as overeating or loss of appetite, persistent feelings of sadness, anxiety, and emotional emptiness, sleep disturbances, impaired concentration, and other manifestations indicative of depression (Nuallaong, 2012). Depression in the workplace can be attributed to various job-related factors, including but not limited to, elevated job demands (Hatch et al., 2019), diminished job control (Li, 2019), an imbalance between work and personal life (Lee et al., 2021), unfavourable working conditions (Saah, Amu & Kissah-Korsah, 2021), a toxic work environment (Rasool et al., 2019), and incongruity between personal values or skills and job requirements (Petrisor et al., 2021).

Mental Health Issues in military

Mental health in the military holds significant significance, as it encompasses a diverse range of psychological and emotional difficulties linked explicitly to the military lifestyle. The rigorous requirements of training, the challenging circumstances of battle, prolonged separations from significant others, and the reintegration into civilian society can collectively contribute to mental health challenges among military personnel (Buechner, 2020). These challenges sometimes manifest as stress, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), among various other mental health disorders (Forbes et al., 2019; Shi et al., 2023). The comprehension and successful management of these problems hold significant relevance, not only for the well-being of military individuals but also for the overall effectiveness and adaptability of military forces. In contemporary times, there has been an increasing acknowledgment and execution of initiatives to mitigate mental health issues inside the military. Nevertheless, ongoing difficulties are associated with the societal stigmatization of mental health, the accessibility of mental health services, and the necessity for tailored therapeutic interventions (Bobbili et al., 2022). The complex and multifaceted nature of mental health challenges within the military is a defining characteristic of this phenomenon. Despite significant progress in understanding and addressing these challenges, persistent impediments remain. The continued emphasis on prioritizing accessible healthcare, education, support services, and destigmatization initiatives is crucial for advancing the overall well-being of military personnel. The path forward requires a comprehensive and sophisticated approach that considers the unique requirements and encounters faced by persons involved in military service. By emphasizing mental health more, military institutions can foster personnel that exhibit enhanced resilience, efficiency, and empathy.

Methodology

The present study employs a survey research methodology in the form of a quantitative investigation. The selected research methodology is survey research, which comprehensively

assesses stress, anxiety, and depression among Paratroopers from the 8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para) based at Kem Terendak, Melaka. A sample size of 371 individuals was determined using the sample size chart developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). In order to mitigate any bias, the sample selection process was conducted using a basic random technique. The survey form was disseminated through the utilization of an online platform, explicitly employing the Google Forms method. Implementing an online platform facilitates the process of responding to research inquiries, allowing participants to respond to questions at their convenience. Additionally, researchers get research inquiries directly upon completion of respondents' answers.

This survey comprises two distinct sections. The initial segment delves into pertinent inquiries, encompassing gender, age, length of service, education level, marital status, unit category, and rank. The ensuing section is tailored to gauge the burnout susceptibility of participants. For this specific study, the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales 21 (DASS-21), a validated questionnaire instrument acknowledged by the Ministry of Health Malaysia (2022), was employed. This tool quantitatively assesses stress, anxiety, and depression levels within the Paratrooper cohort. The questionnaire operates along three dimensions, with responses stratified into five intensity gradations: regular, low, moderate, high, and very high.

Analysis of Data

The present study employs data analysis techniques, specifically descriptive statistics and inferential statistics, utilizing the SPSS program version 28. Descriptive statistics involves summarizing and comprehending the features of a dataset by providing critical information about the sample and measurements. This analysis is commonly used to study demographic data from surveys. It focuses on metrics like mean, standard deviation, percentage, and frequency, which are utilized across various statistical levels. For this study, 371 Paratroopers from the 8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para) at Melaka Terendak Camp were included. The analysis included frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation measures.

Table 1: Mean score interpretation for descriptive analysis

Min Score	Interpretation of Min Score
1.00-2.00	Medium Low
2.01-3.00	Low
3.01-4.00	Medium high
4.01-5.00	High

Source: Nunnally dan Bernstein (1994)

The table presented in Table 1 provides a concise overview of the descriptive analysis statistical testing, whereby the mean and standard deviation have been employed as measures to examine the data. The mean score level for each variable is determined by referring to the mean score interpretation table derived from the work of Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). The mean score level is categorized into four segments: medium-low, low, medium-high, and high.

Findings

Demographic characteristics of respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. The study sample comprises exclusively male participants, with 369 male respondents and only two female participants. This study's findings indicate that most participants fell within the age

range of 26 to 30 years. Furthermore, it was observed that 126 individuals had accumulated a service tenure of 6 to 10 years in the capacity of Paratroopers. The study's findings indicate that a significant proportion of participants have achieved the educational prerequisite of completing high school, specifically 350 individuals possessing the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) qualification. This study analyzed the participants' marital status, revealing that 366 individuals were identified as being married. The survey primarily featured respondents from the Komponi Bantuan, including 85 people, making them the most prominent participants in this research.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variables	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	369	99.5
Female	2	0.5
Age		
20-25 year	104	28
26-30 year	123	33.2
31-35 year	73	19.7
36-40 year	62	16.7
41-50 year	9	2.4
Length of service		
Less than 1 year	4	1.1
1 year to 5 years	118	31.8
6 years to 10 years	126	34
11 years to 15 years	37	10
16 years to 20 years	81	21.8
More than 20 years	5	1.3
Level of education		
SPM/ STPM	350	94.3
Diploma	2	0.5
Degree	8	2.2
Masters	2	0.5
Others	9	2.4
Marital status		
Single	1	0.3
Married	366	98.7
Divorced/Single parent	4	1.1
Duty location		
Markas Batalion	20	5.4
Kompeni Markas	28	7.5
Kompeni Bantuan	85	22.9
Kompeni Alpha	48	12.9

Kompeni Bravo	74	19.9
Kompeni Charlie	67	18.1
Kompeni Delta	49	13.2

DASS-21 Test Paratroopers in the 8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para)

Table 2: DASS-21 Test in Paratroopers in the 8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para)

Construct	Score				
	Normal	Low	Medium	High	Very high
Stress	119(32.1%)	76(20.5%)	54(14.6%)	105(28.3%)	17(4.6%)
Anxiety	0	0	171(46.1%)	61(16.4%)	139(37.5%)
Depression	0	0	254(68.5%)	40(10.8%)	77(20.8%)

According to the data presented in Table 2, most Paratroopers in the 8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para) reported experiencing an average stress level ($f = 119, 32.1\%$). This was followed by 76 individuals (20.5%) who reported a low level of stress, 54 individuals (14.6%) who reported a moderate level of stress, 105 individuals (28.3%) who reported a high level of stress, and a mere 17 individuals (4.6%) who reported a very high level of stress.

Regarding the participants' anxiety levels, most individuals exhibit a moderate level of anxiety ($f = 171, 46.1\%$), while a significant proportion experience a very high level of anxiety ($f = 139, 37.5\%$). Out of the total sample size, 61 individuals, including 16.4% of the participants, exhibit high anxiety. Notably, none of the respondents demonstrate typical or moderate levels of worry. Regarding the severity of depression, most 254 participants (68.5%) reported suffering from severe depression. Additionally, a subset of 77 participants (20.8%) reported a very high degree of depression, while around 40 participants (10.8%) reported an elevated level of sadness. This observation demonstrates that while the degree of stress experienced by Paratroopers in the 8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para) remains manageable, their anxiety levels surpass their levels of depression.

Table 3: Mean value, standard deviation, and mean estimate for stress

No.	Item	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (S)	Mean interpretation
DASS 1	I found it hard to wind down.	1.671	0.653	Medium Low
DASS 6	I tended to over-react to situations.	1.485	0.594	Medium Low
DASS 8	I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy.	1.531	0.642	Medium Low
DASS 11	I found myself getting agitated.	1.369	0.561	Medium Low
DAAS 12	I found it difficult to relax.	1.456	0.606	Medium Low
DASS 14	I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing.	1.418	0.561	Medium Low
DASS 18	I felt that I was rather touchy.	1.404	0.573	Medium Low
Average mean/standard deviation		1.476	0.599	Medium Low

According to the data presented in Table 3, it can be observed that a significant factor contributing to stress among Paratroopers in the 8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para) is their struggle to achieve a state of calmness (mean = 1.671, s.d = 0.653), as indicated by a notably low mean score. Some individuals may attribute stress to a perceived lack of

emotional regulation, resulting in heightened restlessness. The observation above indicates that the extent of emotional regulation within the 8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para) remains suboptimal, as evidenced by disrupted emotional control (mean = 1.404, s.d = 0.573). This lack of emotional composure poses challenges in maintaining a state of tranquillity and contributes to heightened restlessness among the Paratroopers.

Table 3: Mean value, standard deviation, and mean estimate for anxiety

No.	Item	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (S)	Mean interpretation
DASS 2	I was aware of dryness of my mouth.	1.523	0.654	Medium Low
DASS 4	I experienced breathing difficulty (e.g. excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion).	1.340	0.558	Medium Low
DASS 7	I experienced trembling (e.g. in the hands).	1.3477	0.551	Medium Low
DASS 9	I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself.	1.345	0.544	Medium Low
DASS 15	I felt I was close to panic.	1.348	0.531	Medium Low
DASS 19	I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (e.g. sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat).	1.359	0.544	Medium Low
DASS 20	I felt scared without any good reason.	1.337	0.532	Medium Low
Average mean/standard deviation		1.390	0.559	Medium Low

Table 3 presents the characteristics indicating the extent of anxiety observed among the Paratroopers in the 8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para). One notable issue contributing to this anxiety is the phenomenon of reduced body resistance, resulting in a heightened susceptibility to dry mouth among the soldiers (mean = 1.523, s.d = 0.654). Furthermore, a limited subset of participants reported abrupt onset of anxiety or apprehension without identifiable causes (mean = 1.523, standard deviation = 0.654). The presented evidence indicates the presence of anxiety symptoms within the Paratroopers of the 8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para). However, the degree of worry is relatively modest.

Table 4: Mean value, standard deviation, and mean estimate for depression

No.	Item	Mean (<i>M</i>)	Standard deviation (<i>S</i>)	Mean interpretation
DASS 3	I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all.	1.434	0.595	Medium Low
DASS 5	I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things.	1.409	0.588	Medium Low
DASS 10	I felt that I had nothing to look forward to.	1.361	0.577	Medium Low
DASS 13	I felt down-hearted and blue.	1.369	0.566	Medium Low
DASS 16	I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything.	1.364	0.549	Medium Low
DASS 17	I felt I wasn't worth much as a person.	1.307	0.537	Medium Low
DASS 21	I felt that life was meaningless.	1.262	0.508	Medium Low
Average mean/standard deviation		1.358	0.56	Medium Low

The data presented in Table 4 provides an overview of the variables indicative of the degree of depression experienced by Paratroopers within the 8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para). One contributing factor to depressive symptoms among individuals is the perception of an inability to experience good emotions (mean = 1.434, s.d = 0.595). This finding suggests that individuals tend to feel diminished levels of positive motivation in isolation. This phenomenon could lead to decreased motivation among individuals to engage in their professional tasks. A minority of the sample population perceive lacking purpose or significance in their lives (mean = 1.262, s.d = 0.508). The data indicates that Paratroopers in the 8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para) who perceive a lack of purpose in life have a significantly low mean score, suggesting a manifestation of depressive symptoms.

Discussion

The study's classification of the stress level as usual among the Paratroopers in the 8th Battalion is reassuring regarding operational readiness. However, the unsatisfactory level of emotional control identified is a critical concern. This deficiency in emotional control could impair cognitive abilities and decision-making, contributing to the observed tendency towards restlessness and difficulties in executing tasks (Stanley & Larsen, 2021). Strategies to enhance emotional regulation may be required to address these issues. A more alarming finding from the study is the presence of moderate anxiety among most Paratroopers, with some reporting unexplained levels of anxiety or fear. Observing that some members quickly experience dry mouth, which indicates anxiety, hints at physiological manifestations of this condition. While the study characterizes the level of concern as relatively minimal, any indication of anxiety within a military context can have substantial implications. Anxiety can affect focus, reaction times, and teamwork (Orasanu & Backer, 2013). Understanding the root causes related to training, deployment experiences, or other factors is essential for targeted interventions. The report of mild depression among most members, with feelings of lack of positive emotions, less enthusiasm to work, and in some cases, a sense of meaningless existence, is deeply concerning. Depression can severely impact motivation, performance, and well-being (Lin et al., 2017). Depression in a military context might be linked to factors such as strenuous training, separation from family, exposure to traumatic experiences, or lack

of social support within the unit. Targeted mental health support, counseling, and fostering a positive organizational culture may be required to address this challenge.

Recommendation

The 8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para) exhibits a distinctive combination of typical stress levels and difficulties in emotional regulation, heightened anxiety, and symptoms of depression. The intricate interaction between several factors indicates the presence of fundamental problems that cannot be effectively addressed with a universally applicable remedy. In order to effectively tackle the interrelated elements at hand, it is imperative to adopt a comprehensive strategy that considers the unique circumstances and requirements of the unit. The subsequent suggestions offer specific tactics for improving the Paratroopers' psychological well-being and effectiveness. First, implementing programs aimed at teaching emotional management skills should be prioritized by the highest governing body of the Malaysian army. This measure can potentially improve the soldiers' resilience and performance. Secondly, entities like the Human Resources Branch of the Malaysian Army must investigate the precise factors contributing to anxiety within their unit. Subsequently, they should develop targeted treatments, potentially incorporating mindfulness techniques or professional counseling, to address this issue effectively. This methodology can potentially address and effectively mitigate anxiety levels within military personnel. Lastly, every administration level should provide mental health support and counseling, create peer support networks, and focus on leadership training in emotional intelligence to ease depressive symptoms. Regular mental health assessments, anonymous surveys, or well-being check-ins should be conducted to ensure early detection and assistance for emerging mental health concerns.

Conclusion

The obstacles encountered by the 8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para) are not impossible to overcome. Demonstrating dedication, compassion, and a thorough comprehension of the intricate mental health terrain, the 8th Battalion of the Royal Ranger Regiment (Para) possesses the necessary resources and determination to effect enduring change. By adopting the proposed guidelines, all levels of administration have the potential to make valuable contributions toward enhancing the strength, resilience, and emotional intelligence of the organization. The procedures delineated are not solely considered treatments; instead, they represent a strategic allocation of resources towards enhancing physical and mental welfare, boosting morale, and ultimately fostering our military personnel's overall effectiveness and accomplishments. Collectively, it is possible to cultivate a conducive atmosphere that acknowledges and addresses the distinct requirements of individuals engaged in service, guaranteeing their comprehensive physical and mental readiness to confront the challenges associated with their responsibilities effectively. With a clearly defined purpose, it is essential to acknowledge that the decisions made in the present have the potential to significantly influence the Malaysian military's future, thereby improving its overall vitality, well-being, and operational efficiency.

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